

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MADRID 01892 01 OF 02 221900Z
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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
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AMEMBASSY PARIS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 01892

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, SP
SUBJECT: BASQUE GENERAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY. IN ANOTHER IMPORTANT STEP TOWARD THE FULL
NORMALIZATION OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE
CONFLICTIVE BASQUE PROVINCES -- AND TOWARD THE REDEFINITION
OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MADRID AND THE REGIONS
GENERALLY -- 71-YEAR-OLD RAMON RUBIAL, RESPECTED PRESIDENT
OF THE PSOE, WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE RECENTLY-
CONSTITUTED BASQUE GENERAL COUNCIL. THE ELECTION OF
RUBIAL, WHO WON OUT OVER EQUALLY RESPECTED PNV ELDER
STATESMAN JUAN AJURIAGUERRA WAS NOT WITHOUT ITS COSTS,
HOWEVER; THE PNV HAS CHARGED WITH REASON THAT UCD HAD
AGREED IN ADVANCE TO SUPPORT RUBIAL'S CANDIDACY, AND IS
LIKELY TO RESPOND BY BECOMING A MORE DIFFICULT INTER-
LOCUTOR FOR BOTH THE GOVT AND THE PSOE. THE BASQUE
TERRORIST ETA PREDICTABLY HAS DENOUNCED THE ELECTION OF
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PAGE 02 MADRID 01892 01 OF 02 221900Z

THE "CENTRALIST" RUBIAL, AND WE EXPECT AT LEAST SOME
ELEMENTS OF THE NON-VIOLENT BASQUE FAR-LEFT TO DO THE
SAME, REFLECTING THE OBVIOUS DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE MOST
INTENSE BASQUE NATIONALISTS, A SIGNIFICANT MINORITY. END
SUMMARY.

2. PSOE PRESIDENT AND SENATOR FOR VIZCAYA RAMON RUBIAL
ON FEB. 17 WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE 15-MEMBER BASQUE

GENERAL COUNCIL. RUBIAL DEFEATED BASQUE NATIONALIST PARTY (PNV) LEADER JUAN AJURIAGUERRA BY SIX VOTES TO FIVE ON THE EIGHTH BALLOT, WHEN UCD DEPUTY JUAN ECHEVARRIA WHO HAD VOTED FOR AJURIAGUERRA ON PREVIOUS BALLOTS, ABSTAINED. RUBIAL WAS SUPPORTED BY THE OTHER FOUR PSOE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL PLUS THE TWO UCD MEMBERS FOR ALAVA, WHILE AJURIAGUERRA WAS BACKED BY THE OTHER FOUR PNV COUNCIL MEMBERS AND BASQUE FAR-LEFT (EE) MEMBER JUAN MARIA BANDRES. AJURIAGUERRA AND RUBIAL ABSTAINED FROM VOTING, AS DID THE COUNCIL'S FIFTEENTH MEMBER, ALAVA INDEPENDENT LOPEZ, WHOSE SELECTION TO THE COUNCIL WAS THE PRODUCT OF A PSOE-PNV COMPROMISE, SO NEITHER PARTY WOULD HAVE A PLURALITY IN THE PRE-AUTONOMY ORGANISM. (IT HAD ALSO BEEN AGREED THAT LOPEZ WOULD ABSTAIN IN THE VOTING FOR PRESIDENT.)

3. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE BASQUE PRE-AUTONOMY STATUTE (MADRID 0023 AND PREVIOUS), THE COUNCIL WAS FINALLY CONSTITUTED FEB. 13, WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PROVINCES OF ALAVA, GUIPUZCOA AND VIZCAYA, WHOSE PARLIAMENTARIANS VOTED UNANIMOUSLY FOR INCORPORATION. UCD' NAVARRESE PARLIAMENTARIANS, WHO CONSTITUTE A MAJORITY OF THAT PROVINCE'S REPRESENTATION, PREDICTABLY VOTED AGAINST INCORPORATION, THEREBY LEAVING THAT DECISION TO THE "COMPETENT FORAL ORGANISM" TO EMERGE FROM THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AND THE NAVARRESE PEOPLE IN REFERENDUM.

4. ONCE THE MECHANISM FOR THE NAVARRESE DECISION ON INCORPORATION WAS AGREED UPON, THE STICKING POINT WAS THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 MADRID 01892 01 OF 02 221900Z

COMPOSITION OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL ITSELF, WHICH IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE STATUTE CONSISTS OF FIVE MEMBERS FROM EACH PROVINCE ELECTED BY THAT PROVINCE'S PARLIAMENTARIANS. THE SOLUTION FINALLY REACHED INVOLVED GIVING THE PNV AND THE PSOE 5 REPRESENTATIVES EACH, UCD THREE, THE BASQUE FAR-LEFT (EE) ONE, AND WITH THE FIFTEENTH SEAT GOING TO THE CONSENSUS INDEPENDENT. A BREAKDOWN OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP FOLLOWS (THE "PORTFOLIOS" REPORTEDLY WILL BE DECIDED ON LATER THIS WEEK):

-- ALAVA: JESUS MARIA VIANA AND PEDRO MORALES (UCD); JOSE ANTONIO AGURIANO (PSOE); JOSE MARIA OLLORA (PNV); AND JOSE MANUAL LOPEZ DE JUAN ABAD (INDEPENDENT).

-- GUIPUZCOA: ANDONI MONFORTE AND CARLOS SANTAMARIA (PNV); JOSE MARIA BENEGAS AND JOSE ANTONIO MATURANA (PSOE); AND JUAN MARIA BANDRES (EE).

-- VIZCAYA: JUAN AJURIAGUERRA AND MIKEL ISASI (PNV); RAMON RUBIAL AND JUAN IGLESIAS (PSOE); AND JUAN ECHEVARRIA (UCD).

5. COMMENT: THE PNV CHARGED WITH SOME BITTERNESS BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE ELECTION OF RUBIAL THAT IT HAD BEEN "PACTED" BY UCD AND THE PSOE IN ADVANCE. ALTHOUGH BOTH PARTIES PUBLICLY DENY THIS, THE PSOE'S ENRIQUE MUGICA AND

UCD'S JOSE PEDRO PEREZ LLORCA HAVE TOLD US PRIVATELY THAT RUBIAL'S ELECTION WAS INDEED AGREED BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES. THE UCD'S SUPPORT FOR RUBIAL SIMPLY CONFIRMS THAT UCD-PSOE COMPETITION NOTWITHSTANDING, GIVEN THE CHOICE BETWEEN SPANIARDS WHO HAPPEN TO BE BASQUES (THE PSOE) AND BASQUES WHO TEND TO THINK THAT THEY ONLY HAPPEN TO BE SPANIARDS (THE PNV), THE GOVT WILL OPT FOR THE FORMER EVERY TIME.

6. UNDERSTANDABLE AS THIS MIGHT BE, IT IS NO EASIER FOR THE PNV, WHICH FEELS IT HAS BEEN GANGED UP ON BY THE

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PAGE 01 MADRID 01892 02 OF 02 221859Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 MADRID 01892

"ESPANOLISTAS," TO ACCEPT. ALTHOUGH THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL IS MORE SYMBOLIC THAN SUBSTANTIVE, SUCH SYMBOLS ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT IN SPANISH POLITICAL LIFE, PARTICULARLY TO A PARTY LIKE THE PNV WHICH CONSIDERS ITSELF THE REPOSITORY OF BASQUE NATIONALIST LEGITIMACY. MOREOVER, THE PNV, WHICH GARNERED SOME 6000 VOTES AND ONE LOWER HOUSE SEAT MORE THAN THE PSOE IN THE THREE PROVINCES CLEARLY BELIEVES IT HAD THE PRESIDENCY COMING ON THE BASIS OF ITS ELECTORAL SHOWING, AND ALSO ON THE BASIS OF ITS CENTRIST ORIENTATION AND GENERAL TENDENCY TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT THUS FAR IN THE CORTES. ALL OF THIS IS LIKELY TO MAKE THE PNV A TOUGHER INTERLOCUTOR FOR THE GOVT AND THE PSOE, A POSTURE WHICH THE PNV'S ELECTORATE,

CERTAIN TO BE DISAPPOINTED WITH AJURIAGUERRA'S DEFEAT,
IS LIKELY TO SUPPORT AND PERHAPS EVEN INSIST UPON.
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